

Soul-Searching and Motherhood

by Stephanie Bachmann Mattei, Ph.D., CNVC certified NVC trainer

When we become parents, we implicitly embark on an unanticipated and amazing journey of self-discovery. Parenting can actually be the way to some of the greatest breakthroughs in life.

If I take a good look at my journey of motherhood, I become more and more aware of the inner transformation that has been taking place within my being.

If I were to describe in a few words my personality B.C. (Before Children), I would have to recognize that my head had always ruled me more than my heart. I was always more inclined to be fair-minded rather than empathic. I always wished for myself more clarity of reason rather than strength of compassion. I concerned myself with what was actual, rather than what was possible. I tended to be more firm than gentle. And I judged it worse to be unjust rather than merciless.

This, until I became a mother.

I now realize that, since I became a mother, day after day, I have been empowered to develop other characteristics. In fact, now I find myself honestly valuing the heart more than the head, and compassion more than fairness.

The example of a drop of water is coming to mind. A little drop of water, going unnoticed to most, can nonetheless produce, over time, a cavity in a stone. Constancy and time are the components that allow for change.



So, what compares to this little drop of water in my life?

The awareness that my children are their own beings, yet, we are deeply and unconditionally interconnected. My mission as a mother is, thus, to help them unfold their unique qualities and develop their talents at their best. My purpose is to foster their self-empowerment in order for them to manifest their potential and to live what to them is a meaningful life.

And, paradoxically, attending to that requires that I do not forget myself: helping them unfold their unique qualities and develop their talents entails supporting myself in staying true to my authenticity, unfolding my own unique qualities and developing the talents that have been given to me.

Supporting my children in fully becoming themselves is intertwined with my own unfolding. And the latter is actually supported by their being part of my life.

The subtle, yet life-transforming shift in my value system has been actually made possible by keeping myself open to the invitation/challenge to be as present as I can to myself and to my kids, at each given moment. The commitment to remain open entails a willingness to be moved and transformed by my children's presence and lives.

My three children helped me clarify my own parenting philosophy, which then gave me the courage to follow my heart in mothering them. Even if this meant to choose a style of parenting that was and still is socially counter-current or different from the way my husband and I were parented. The cultural gap manifested itself around attachment styles, night time strategies, inter-generational consideration and respect, relational and social behaviors, and the like. All were and still are approached with an understanding of discipline as influential guidance, not top-down control.

Understanding that discipline is intertwined with a deep respect of the child's personality, with mindful forethought of the age and stage of the child, and with gentle acceptance of the child's capabilities, made my inner transformation possible.

It is through readings, workshops, retreats, mentoring and lots of empathy that I have learned to value myself and my need-based limits, without underplaying gentleness, sensitivity and care for my children's feelings and needs.

Children see the world with different eyes than ours. What seems legitimate to us parents may very well seem unfair to them. And what appears reasonable to them may appear quite foolish to us! I have come to understand and appreciate that, when conflicts arise, what bridges the gap between parents and kids is indeed empathy and compassion. And a deep trust that we matter to each other.

From such a place, my husband and I are enabled to lovingly guide our children; our way of relating to them is firmly rooted in the intention to convey the unshakable security of compassion and the warmth of an appreciative, caring and reassuring heart.

For me, the job of parenting actually lies in our capacity to see beyond actual facts and behold the potentials. It is a balanced act of encouraging our children without pushing them, to respect their limits without limiting them, to draw the best out of them without putting conditions on our love.

My totally dependent and needy babies at my breast enabled me to really taste the flavor of an empathic and compassionate heart and helped me realize how nurturing eye contact, tone of voice, and touch can be.

My daily endeavors in the job of parenting are teaching me that we all fall short of our values at times. And this realization humbles me. My children's readiness to forgive, time and again, my mistakes and limitations enlightens me on how powerful compassion is in our fragile, yet paradoxically powerful, human relationships.

Nonviolent Communication has been a crucial contribution to my life as a person, spouse and

mother. It has helped me extend the closeness I experienced during the early years of my children's lives by nourishing the attachment, the trust, and the care for one another based on the awareness and experience of interdependence.

Stephanie Bachmann Mattei, Ph.D., is the mother of three self-educated children (biological and adopted). Stephanie is a certified trainer with the Center for Nonviolent Communication, and is passionate to share her understanding of NVC as a process to empower oneself and others to celebrate the humanity in one's own being, and to encounter the humanity in the other person. She is a co-sponsor (with the NVC Academy) of the upcoming Parenting Matters Teleconference. Parenting is Stephanie's niche. Stephanie loves connecting NVC with mindfulness-based neuroscience to support self-understanding, healing and wholeness.

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